



Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Founded 1926

December 6, 2005

Mayor Ron Gonzales
Council Member Forrest Williams
Coyote Valley Specific Plan Task Force Task Force Members
801 North First St., Rm. 600
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Coyote Valley Specific Plan Design and Planning Requirements

Dear members of the Task Force:

Having participated in the ongoing advisory committees on the Coyote Valley Specific Plan (CVSP), the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS) is concerned that the CVSP Task Force's current progress has not adequately addressed issues about the city's smart growth raised by environmental groups such as mitigation for agricultural lands and thorough analysis of phasing scenarios with respect to development triggers and environmental constraints.

In 2003, the City Council approved guidelines for the vision and expected outcomes for the CVSP that would ensure San Jose's continued commitment to smart growth. The statements addressed issues such as; transit options, density, jobs-housing balance, and mixed-use zoning that would maximize efficient land usage. The flip side of this, of course, is to maximize efficient land conservation. One of the major principles behind smart growth, after all, is sustainable development--whether it is developing compact communities or "developing" and protecting open green space.

We thank the city's planning department for convening the Environmental Focus Group on November 11th where environmental smart growth principles were raised and hope to soon see these principles incorporated into work prepared by the consultants for the plan. Besides "greening" the phasing scenarios and mitigation plans, other concerns were discussed including the sustainability of the restored Fisher Creek with respect to other hydrological factors, a wildlife corridor connecting the east and west sides of the northern section of the valley, and the overall ecological footprint of the plan.

In light of this recent focus group meeting, we would like to provide some comments for the Task Force to take into consideration with respect to the specific plan's timing and logistical requirements.

Open Space Preservation:

- In accordance with the San Jose 2020 General Plan, CVSP should present a concrete mitigation plan to make the Greenbelt a feasible agricultural area and protect foothills and hillsides of both the Santa Teresa hills and western hills of Coyote Valley in order to preserve San Jose's distinctive vistas and wildlife habitats. While the established "Greenline" is an important concept, it does not take into account the need to also preserve wildlife spaces and corridors within North and Central Coyote such as the riparian greenways of Coyote Creek and a restored Fisher Creek or the foothills.

Current Development Triggers:

- One of the major difficulties of the CVSP is planning for an unknown demographic and employer base. As advisory committee members have noted, planning and design concepts for everything from housing to schools and medical facilities requires more information on demographics which could be extrapolated from an analysis of jobs. Although Coyote Valley has not reached the 5,000 jobs trigger set by the General Plan to warrant development, the CVSP Task Force appears poised to recommend the replacement of this safeguard with a jobs-housing concurrency plan. Adherence to original General Plan triggers is crucial for a well-informed CVSP that would be integrated with greater San Jose.
- Another difficulty related to development triggers is the tendency to treat Coyote Valley as a separate entity from San Jose. While it is clear that the city cannot spare funds for public infrastructure development in Coyote Valley, this does not obviate the need to consider Coyote Valley's relationship with greater San Jose (and neighboring cities). Redevelopment initiatives in Central San Jose represent exciting smart growth infill strategies that are precisely for the purpose of reducing the need for new development. Development triggers and phasing for Coyote Valley must reflect the opportunities available in the entire city and take advantage of the unique opportunity to scale back the ecological footprint of Coyote Valley.

Phasing:

- Coordination with environmental factors is also crucial to CVSP. Hydrological analysis of the Coyote Valley Planning area shows how the Coyote Valley development cannot function without its system of creeks and wetlands, which serve as flood management and water quality mechanisms (ref. Hydrology presentation, Task Force Meeting 4/12/04). While current phasing recommendations take into account revenues and infrastructure costs, it is unclear whether such environmental costs and benefits have been factored in.

Smart Growth Design:

- In order to facilitate development processes such the CVSP, the city must consider incorporating guidelines for smart growth design and policy reforms into the General

Plan that allow for such creative solutions. The CVSP is overburdened with the need to address smart growth issues that can be alleviated with city or regional smart growth guidelines and policies. Additionally, the city may need to differentiate between smart growth infill (redevelopment) and urban growth management (new development), which require different guidelines and policies.

- Some areas of consideration include transit/parking, density, jobs/housing capacity, mixed-use zones, town center and main streets configurations with retail/service nodes and pedestrian-oriented circulation. (See Resources: Metro Title 11 - Urban Growth Management for an example of smart growth code.) While CVSP attempts to address many of these areas, it is clear that members and consultants of the advisory committees require more guidelines and information beyond Coyote Valley in order to work effectively.

The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society respects the City of San Jose's vision of smart growth. As noted in the CVSP Progress Report, No.2, "...the Coyote Valley process involves a paradigm shift from the traditional land planning/urban design driven model for developing specific plans to one that evolves from the existing natural environment or 'Environmental Footprint' and focuses on working with the land." The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society would really like to see your development efforts truly consider current environmental conditions in Coyote Valley.

Cordially,



Brenda Torres-Barreto
Executive Director